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Chairman: Mr. Mapuranga ..... (Zimbabwe)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 89: Questions relating to information (*continued*) (A/52/21, A/52/455 and Corr.1)

1. **Mr. Ndogo** (Cameroon) said that his delegation believed that constructive exchange of views was the essence of effective communication. Accordingly, it welcomed the decision of the Secretary-General to put communications at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization. Information was the key element of diplomacy, representation and negotiation.

2. The Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities should be commended for laying the groundwork for effectively projecting the image of the United Nations and strengthening the necessary partnership of Member States in taking the message of the United Nations to the world.

3. When trying to create a culture of communication it must be remembered that communication was in large part non-verbal. The people of the world not only would listen to declarations and proclamations but, and above all, they would look at what was being done every day to strengthen the image of the Organization which, half a century earlier, had affirmed the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.

4. Although much progress had been made since the Second World War – the fact that the independent nation of Cameroon was part of the United Nations was proof thereof – progress was needed also in the area of the mass media. Unfortunately, the voices of the smaller nations were not, as yet, transmitted as forcefully as those of the powerful nations. When the history of most peoples of the world was told only from the perspective of third parties the result was a growing standardization of thought which could only be detrimental to humankind. Unless some balance could be achieved in the flow of ideas the world might soon be worrying, not about freedom of expression but about freedom to form independent thought.

5. Action must be taken on two fronts. First, there was a need for continued support from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other United Nations bodies to help poor nations acquire a minimum of communication infrastructure. Secondly, it was necessary to continue encouraging the initiatives of the Department of Public Information in order to achieve balanced communications. The Department had reported that the number of accesses to its Home Page had reached the one million per week mark and that it had begun international radio broadcasts from United Nations Headquarters and a weekly three-minute television programme via CNN and other networks. However, those efforts remained small and their impact minimal.

6. The United Nations could and should do more. For example, with two United Nations radio and television networks it would be possible for the members of the world community to voice their views on the issues of the day in a context of impartiality, or at least pluralism. That was not over optimistic. His country knew from experience what the United Nations could do. With the United Nations anything was possible. Without it nothing durable or constructive could be achieved, especially in the field of communications.

7. **Mr. Thapa** (Nepal) said that communication had played a central role in the growth and development of human society. Given the rapid advances of communications technology in recent years it was likely that it would have an even greater impact on people's lives in the next century. The United Nations should take advantage of those advances in its efforts to promote international peace and security. Accordingly, the capacity of the Department of Public Information should be strengthened in order to enable it to carry out its mandate and achieve the United Nations public information objective.

8. His delegation supported the measures proposed by the Secretary-General to reorient United Nations public information activities, and hoped that, in implementing the reform efforts, the views of Member States would be taken into account. Those measures would certainly help the Department of Public Information create a culture of communication throughout the Organization.

9. Although his delegation supported the efforts of the Department to take advantage of the technological progress to disseminate information electronically, it stressed that information should continue to be disseminated by traditional means in order to meet the needs of the technologically less advanced countries. Radio, in particular, was an extremely cost-effective means of reaching a wide audience. His delegation was pleased that the Department was continuing to expand the production and distribution of radio products, in partnership with Member States and it reiterated its request for the inclusion of the Nepali language in United Nations radio programmes. It was appreciative of the services that the Dag Hammarskjöld Library was providing and it supported the ongoing reforms which would further enhance the library's functions.

10. The Department of Public Information should strengthen its information activities concerning peacekeeping operations, and improve coordination with the

Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs so as to ensure accurate and up-to-date information on such activities. His delegation welcomed the progress made in planning a campaign to promote public awareness of United Nations peacekeeping activities in connection with the fiftieth anniversary of those activities and reiterated the suggestion that the Department should publish photographs and full accounts of peacekeepers who had lost their lives in the line of duty.

11. In conclusion, he thanked UNESCO for the valuable work it was doing in promoting freedom of the press. The international community must strive to develop free, independent and pluralistic media, since they were essential components of a free and democratic society.

12. **Mr. Skrypko** (Belarus) noted with satisfaction that the proposals regarding the reorientation of activities contained in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform" (A/51/950) were intended to contribute to a more positive perception by the international public of the important and varied activities carried out by the United Nations.

13. His delegation agreed with some of the conclusions contained in that report and was convinced that the only way the United Nations could enjoy high international prestige would be by placing the communications function at the very heart of the strategic management of the Organization, by recognizing that information activities were no less important than international security or development, and by providing sufficient resources for the delivery of information programmes.

14. His delegation welcomed the news that the Secretary-General intended to ensure that the information capability of the Secretariat was more intimately linked with and supportive of the activities of the substantive departments. It also supported the proposed decentralization of resources in the information field and their refocusing at the country and regional levels and the proposal that greater use should be made of existing local capabilities and information centres.

15. His delegation also supported the actions planned to create a culture of communication throughout the Organization. All those measures, under the strong direction of an Under-Secretary-General, would help transform the United Nations into an effective, modern, communications-oriented organization.

16. In the reform process the importance of highlighting the socio-economic problems being experienced by the countries with economies in transition must not be overlooked. Objective information on the specific problems preventing the economies in transition from rapidly attaining sustainable development would help to mobilize assistance from the international community to implement the political and economic changes needed in those countries.

17. In that context, Belarus supported the strengthening of the role of the information components of United Nations field offices in the countries with economies in transition. The budgetary reductions provided for under the general programme of reform must not diminish the capacity of the centres to carry out their valuable work.

18. Referring to the Chernobyl disaster, he said that the United Nations must continue and increase its long-term information activities in that connection. The increase in public awareness of the humanitarian, medical and ecological consequences of the catastrophe must form part of the mandate of the new Office for Communications and Public Information.

19. **Mr. Sriyono** (Indonesia) said that his delegation attached the utmost importance to the establishment of a new world information and communication order. There was a need to establish balance in the dissemination of information, to ensure that it came from varied sources, and to change the dependent status of developing countries. While the current communications revolution had had powerful and positive effects in some countries, most countries of the world still failed to enjoy the enormous benefits arising from exchanges of information.

20. The Committee on Information was called upon to play a fundamental role in the implementation of the concept of a new world information and communication order, a process that must be dynamic and ongoing. To that end the international community must continue its joint efforts to devise a mutually beneficial framework of cooperation and to coordinate such activities at the United Nations, so that the Organization could maintain its primacy in that field.

21. As the mass media developed in the coming years, particularly in a pluralist society, it was essential to stress the need for professionalism, social responsibility and a sense of ethics. Global satellite communication must continue to build bridges of understanding between the peoples of the world, by disseminating objective, impartial and unbiased information, obtained from responsible sources.

22. The world was approaching the dawn of a new century and there was no doubt that at such a critical moment in history, characterized by profound change, the United

Nations would be called upon to grapple with problems relating to peace and security as well as development issues. The Department of Public Information could be expected to play a fundamental role, and measures should be taken to strengthen it so that it could meet the expectations of Member States. Bearing in mind its important work, the Department of Public Information should take into account the views of Member States when disseminating information.

23. Indonesia fully endorsed the guiding principles of the new communications strategy proposed by the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities, in particular the principle that United Nations global messages, activities and information must reflect and be tailored to meaningful local contexts.

24. It had been evident that training and assistance programmes were needed to establish equity and equality in the flow of information. He welcomed the work that UNESCO, and in particular its International Programme for the Development of Communications, had done to assist developing countries in overcoming their disadvantages, work which had had a positive impact on every aspect of the new world information and communication order. Similarly, the regional seminars it conducted in conjunction with the Department of Public Information were of incalculable value in promoting human resources development in the developing countries in the field of information and communications.

25. His delegation hoped that United Nations Information Centres, which represented an essential component of United Nations outreach activities, particularly in developing countries, would be strengthened. Further, he endorsed the proposal to merge United Nations Information Centres with United Nations Development Programme offices, provided that, in each case, the views of the host country were taken into account. He noted that the Jakarta United Nations Information Centre, established almost 12 years earlier, had become an indispensable element in disseminating United Nations objectives and programmes among local teaching and information institutions.

26. **Mr. Pham Quang Vinh** (Viet Nam) said that his delegation shared the view that the work of the United Nations in the field of information should focus on the Organization's priorities, most importantly the maintenance of international peace and security and the promotion of economic and social development, where information had a crucial role to play. In today's world, characterized by widespread disparities in technological advances and a widening gap between the developed and developing countries, the establishment of a new world information and communication order was of the utmost concern and importance. Information should not be used to undermine values, distort facts and demonstrate a bias towards countries with different systems and values.

27. His delegation commended the Department of Public Information for having successfully met the increasing demand for information and for its effective and professional service in the current financial crisis of the United Nations. The Department had already begun its renovation with a view to creating a reliable basis for future reform. While he welcomed those efforts, any change in the Department's structure must take into account General Assembly mandates. In particular, the Department must use its mandate to play a primary, rather than subsidiary, role in generating support for development worldwide. The Organization's public information programme must be as substantive as its economic, humanitarian or other programmes, and the Department must definitely not be an administrative or support service. Reform must not be an end in itself; its objective must not be limited to cost-cutting, it must enhance efficiency and produce more with less.

28. His delegation supported the integration of United Nations Information Centres with UNDP field offices, but integration must be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host country. Further, in Member States without information centres, the Department of Public Information should give high priority to providing them with more information materials, training and other assistance with a view to diminishing the information gap between developed and developing countries.

29. His delegation expressed its appreciation at the efforts made by the Department of Public Information over the past two years in disseminating materials electronically to expand United Nations outreach and save money. However, traditional media, such as printed matter, radio and television, remained indispensable in meeting the needs of countries that were technologically less advanced than others, especially developing countries.

30. The Committee on Information had an important role to play in the field of information; that role must be strengthened. During the current year, under extraordinary circumstances, the Committee had completed its work and had adopted its report and recommendations by consensus; however, due to those circumstances it had been unable to consider other relevant issues, in particular those relating to the reform of the United Nations in the area of information. That was a cause for concern for many delegations. His

delegation was grateful to the Committee for the work it had been doing in recent years and wished to urge it to take into account the views and special needs of Member States before looking in detail at the principles proposed in the report of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities.

31. **Mr. Baali** (Algeria) said that it was unfortunate that due to "exceptional" circumstances the Committee had been unable to complete all its business at its nineteenth session and had therefore been unable to participate in the general discussions relating to the reform of the United Nations, particularly as regards information and communications activities. His delegation hoped that the Committee would be able to work under better conditions at its next session.

32. The ongoing technological revolution and the rapid changes that had taken place in many countries made it clear that information and communications know-how and technology would be essential if nations were to advance in the new century. However, many countries would witness the birth of that new era as spectators rather than actors. Given the present configuration of international relations and the way in which such know-how and technology was currently distributed it seemed likely that that unjust regime would continue to prevail for a long time to come. It was for that reason that, some years earlier, the establishment of a new world information and communication order had become a legitimate aspiration of many countries; that should be borne in mind, particularly when an opportunity arose to consider that issue within the context of the United Nations.

33. As for the Secretary-General's reform proposals within the context of information and communications, his delegation believed that although the issue of reform should be discussed by the General Assembly in plenary meeting, the Committee on Information, as a specialized body, should be consulted and should have an opportunity to express its views on the recommendations of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities.

34. His delegation fully agreed with the Secretary-General regarding the need to place the communications function at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization. When reforming the information sector, efforts should be made to strengthen the structure responsible for managing that sector and to keep it at the Departmental level rather than downgrading it to level of Office. Algeria welcomed the suggestion that that sector should be headed by an Under-Secretary-General.

35. With regard to information strategy, Algeria shared the Secretary-General's hopes regarding the expansion of the United Nations capacity to disseminate information and the increase in the effectiveness of such activities in order to project a better public image of the Organization. However, that goal should not take precedence over the principal *raison d'etre* of the Department of Public Information, namely, to provide users with a package of services and to furnish Member States and the general public with the greatest possible amount of useful objective and functional date. The desire to improve the image of the United Nations should not transform information activities into a mechanism for propaganda. The best instruments for improving the image of the United Nations were the Organization's own activities. If the United Nations achieved palpable positive results, its image would improve.

36. Referring to certain specific issues in the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/52/455) that were of particular interest to his delegation, he stressed the need to respect the mandates established by the General Assembly; the specific programmes adopted by Member States should retain the priority that they had been given. Secondly, he said that the Department of Public Information should pay more attention to matters concerning decolonization and economic and social development, as well as paying attention, as it was doing, to issues relating to human rights and peacekeeping operations. Thirdly, he reiterated his support for the Department of Public Information's programme on the question of Palestine and said that it was commendable that the United Nations commitment to the cause of the Palestinian people continued to be manifested in the information activities. Fourthly, his delegation supported the proposal that the United Nations information centres should be integrated with the UNDP field offices, provided that the views of the host country were taken into account in each case, but it was not in favour of a reduction in human resources or any change in the mandates or operations of those centres.

37. In conclusion, he said that his delegation agreed with those who had spoken of the need to expand the capacities of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and to provide it with more real material support in order to enable it to continue fulfilling its all-important role as documentation and reference centre.

38. **Mr. Yousefi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) expressed concern at the increasing inequality in the distribution of access, resources and opportunities in the field of information and communications, and noted that the inequalities between industrialized and developing nations as regards information and related technology were

increasing. The result was the emergence of a new poverty which could be termed "information poverty". Those imbalances were also emerging in the communication infrastructures and they were causing distortions in the flow of information. His delegation believed that a code of conduct should be drawn up in order to regulate the flow of information, since the media did not tend to respect the cultural and moral values of all nations.

39. The reorganization of the information services and the adoption of a comprehensive strategy of communications were important elements of the ongoing reform process. His delegation hoped that the reorientation of the United Nations public information activities and the reform of the Department of Public Information would not diminish the latter's activities in those areas of special interest to the developing countries and would not contribute to widening the existing gap between the developing and developed countries in that crucial area. He agreed with the view expressed by the Secretary-General in his report (A/51/950) that the General Assembly must provide strategic guidance and direction for the communication and information function. The network of United Nations information centres and services played a pivotal role in all United Nations activities; his delegation attached great importance to them since they disseminated information to all States, particularly to developing countries. Accordingly, they must be provided with sufficient resources.

40. His delegation appreciated the ongoing efforts of the Department of Public Information to keep abreast of developments in the field of electronic information dissemination. However, since that technology was not available worldwide, it believed that the Department should continue disseminating information through traditional means. It welcomed the progress made by the Committee and recalled that the mechanism of consultations should be further elaborated. In that connection his delegation believed that it was imperative to set up an open-ended group for informal consultations and for preparing the report of the Committee.

41. **Mr. Hong Je Ryong** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the rapid development of information and communication technologies was having a great impact worldwide and emerging as one of the important international political issues that deserved the attention of all Member States. Inequalities and imbalances still existed in the field in question, owing partly to the ever-greater disparities in the economic development of countries, which posed a major challenge to the international community.

42. Information activities should promote understanding and reconciliation and strengthen cooperation and friendship among countries. However, some countries were imposing their ideas and cultural values on others – and even distorting the reality of developing countries – by taking advantage of their monopoly of modern information and communication technologies. The aim of such politically motivated acts was to create chaos and disorder in the targeted countries by instigating anti-government forces. That constituted interference in the internal affairs of other States and an infringement of international law, and demonstrated the need to establish a new world information and communication order.

43. To set up such a new order, in their information activities Member States must, first and foremost, strictly observe the principles of the sovereignty of States and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States. The historical and cultural traditions and socio-political systems of developing countries must be respected, and States must desist from any attempt to impose their own cultures and systems through the mass media. At the same time, the necessary steps must be taken to ensure that the developing countries participated in international information activities on an equitable basis. In that connection, he wished to emphasize the need for the developing countries to strengthen cooperation and exchanges in the field of information on the basis of the principle of collective self-reliance. One of the measures taken by the non-aligned countries in that respect had been the decision announced in the Pyongyang Declaration to set up international information centres in different parts of the world.

44. The United Nations should regard the establishment of a new world information and communication order as one of its major tasks. To ensure that the new order was equitable, the United Nations must, in bringing it into being, take into account the needs and views of the developing countries, which constituted the majority of the Members of the United Nations. Attention must also be paid to strengthening information dissemination capacity in the developing countries, by means of such practical measures as transferring information technologies, training information officials and enhancing the information infrastructure of the countries concerned.

45. His delegation supported the draft resolution submitted by the Committee on Information (A/AC.198/1997/L.2) and believed that the proposal for reforming the United Nations information system should include ways and means of implementing the reform, and not just focus on improving the image of the United Nations.

46. **Mr. Dumitriu** (Romania) said that his delegation endorsed the statement by Luxembourg on behalf of the European Union and associated countries and shared the view expressed by other delegations that the United Nations needed a strategy as part of the ongoing reform process. The United Nations was in particular in need of an appropriate public image at a time when it was confronted not only with a financial crisis but also with an inaccurate perception of itself transmitted by some media. The commodity that the Department of Public Information was promoting was a crucial one: the achievements of the United Nations in implementing the Charter. However, the United Nations must promote an image that was not self-flattering or better than reality itself, and must improve the way in which it attracted the interest and support among Governments, the mass media and youth. Recognition of the United Nations as an indispensable global institution depended primarily on the efficiency with which it carried out its activities and on their impact. At the same time, better communication and advocacy work were vital in a world where the forces of globalization were growing more powerful.

47. His delegation was very appreciative of many of the conclusions of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities; the new communication strategy called for information that was relevant both globally and locally, had an appropriate impact and was cost-effective. United Nations information activities must compete with a multitude of new international actors that might serve interests other than those of the United Nations. The Department of Public Information should, however, not become a news agency, because there were responsibilities that only the United Nations could assume. The best approach for meeting the requirements of both global relevance and local credibility was to work in partnership with Governments, media representatives, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations. The communication strategy must be subordinate to the fundamental principles and purposes set forth in the Charter. Although streamlining functions was often beneficial, continuous financial constraints could obstruct any improvements and stand in the way of the proper performance of existing functions.

48. The Secretariat's constant efforts to take full advantage of new information technologies, including the Internet and electronic publishing, were to be welcomed. Although traditional methods should continue to be used in a suitable proportion, use of the Internet had clearly led to savings and greater capacity to communicate. One way of improving the image of the United Nations would be to focus on young students, who were the most enthusiastic users of the Internet. The fact that the United Nations home page had been accessed over 13 million times in the first seven months of 1997 was a positive trend that should be encouraged. His delegation was pleased to note how successful some of the public information programmes were; further thematically integrated information programmes should be developed on such United Nations priority issues as the promotion of peace and security, democracy, human rights, sustainable development, and social and economic development.

49. His delegation shared the concern expressed by the Secretary-General in paragraph 60 of his report (A/52/455); it had already on previous occasions raised the question of whether integrating United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices might in some instances be detrimental to the centres' work. His country, which supported integration as a matter of principle, called on the Secretariat to give close consideration to the situation and take the necessary steps. In the context of the current reform process, in which closer integration was sought at the field level, lessons must be drawn from the information centres' experience.

50. His delegation attached great importance to the work of the United Nations information centre in Bucharest, which was visited frequently and had developed its own Internet home page. The centre's essential capacity must be kept intact; the Department of Public Information must therefore continue to seek solutions to the centre's precarious financial situation. Lastly, he commended the Committee on Information for its work; that Committee should keep building on the consensus that it had achieved, so as to be able to provide clear guidelines to the Department of Public Information in its future endeavours.

51. **Ms. Cox** (Guyana) said that her delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by Jamaica on behalf of the Caribbean Community; information was an extremely important issue at the United Nations now because information activities were currently being reviewed, and it was important that appropriate changes should be devised. Furthermore, when those changes were implemented, they must be evaluated at every step of the way in order to ensure that they had the desired effect. As examination of the report of the Secretary-General (A/52/455) showed, the Department of Public Information had made creative use of the depleted resources at its disposal and of the advances in information and communication technology. That augured well for the future of the Department and of the United Nations as a whole.

52. The Department was going through a period of transition that was crucial for its future; it could

unquestionably assume responsibility for making communication an integral part of United Nations operations, instead of playing merely a supportive role. As indicated in the report of the Task Force (A/AC.198/1997/CRP.1), the United Nations must regain the influence it had lost, as well as the interest and support of external agents, and communicate a relevant message effectively. For her country, the new message was what was most important, since the developing countries were being sidelined: globalization was not benefiting all countries and had disadvantageous effects on smaller countries. Information and its associated technologies were very important for development. With the declining interest in international cooperation for development, information was probably one of the areas on which the United Nations needed to focus most. The Department of Public Information should not only communicate the collective United Nations message to people the world over, it must also foster an interchange among local cultures, thereby increasing the South's contribution to the information available to the international community. The services provided by the United Nations were surely the best means of doing so and could help to bridge the widening gap between developed and developing countries in the field of information.

53. Referring once again to the Department's activities and innovations outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (A/52/455), such as the CyberSchoolBus, she said that one still wondered, however, what the true impact of such United Nations outreach activities was; the United Nations should place equal emphasis on the dissemination of information by traditional means and by electronic means, and every effort must be made to make people aware that the information was available. In that connection, her delegation supported Haiti's recent request that a United Nations information centre should be set up in Port-au-Prince and urged the Department to implement operative paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 38/82 B, concerning the introduction of programming in French and Creole in its Caribbean Radio Unit.

54. **Mr. Saguier Caballero** (Paraguay), speaking on behalf of the countries members of the Rio Group, said that the Group fully supported any initiative that would ensure broad dissemination of information on United Nations activities, facilitate the promotion and recognition of its work and enhance its standing. That would not only meet the growing international demand for information, but would also be an extremely important mechanism for enabling the public around the world to learn about and better understand the Organization's activities. As a result, public and private entities would provide United Nations activities with greater support. The Rio Group therefore supported any decision that would facilitate the strengthening of the competent United Nations bodies.

55. The Rio Group welcomed the outcome of the work of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities, particularly the Task Force's report (A/AC.198/1997/CRP.1), which contained elements of fundamental importance for formulating the reform proposals of the Department of Public Information. The Rio Group was also pleased that the United Nations was using new technology for disseminating information, such as maintaining an Internet home page and using the optical disk system, since those innovations placed the United Nations in the vanguard in that respect. However, traditional media should not be neglected, because most people in the world were still not connected to electronic communication networks. He wished to stress in that connection, that it was important to distribute documentation in the languages of each region, particularly the Romance languages, two of which were official languages of the United Nations. United Nations Radio also had an important role to play, since it could reach the poorest population segments and populations in remote areas. He also wished to stress the value of the work done and the assistance provided by the Department of Public Information; he wished to express his gratitude for the informative daily meetings held by the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General, which the permanent missions found extremely useful.

56. The Rio Group, which was concerned that the Committee on Information had been unable to complete its work in 1997, noted that that Committee's nineteenth session had been characterized by an endeavour to identify viable proposals for the reform of the Department of Public Information, a task which had revealed the scale of the difficulties involved. In that connection, the Rio Group hoped that at its next session the Committee on Information would take the initiative of preparing its own proposals for the reform of the Department, since that Committee's proposals would represent a real contribution to the Secretary-General's initiatives in that area.

57. The Rio Group was also concerned at the announced reduction in the number of United Nations information centres, chiefly centres in developing countries, which were a valuable link between the public and the United Nations and were as such essential for promoting public interest in United Nations activities. Since the centres played such an important role, there should not be any cuts in the budgetary allocation for them. With respect to merging the centres with other offices in the United Nations system, the Rio Group believed that the existing mandates laid down appropriate

guidelines and that the integration of the centres could therefore only be considered on a case-by-case basis, with due account being taken of host countries' views and with due care being taken to avoid any adverse impact on the centre's information role and autonomy.

58. The United Nations was of great significance for the future of mankind, not only because its decisions were of the utmost importance for international peace and security, but also because it dealt with other matters of vital importance. That situation gave rise to a growing need for information, which must be provided to the public in an appropriate and reliable manner. That called for a strengthened information system that was responsive, objective and accurate.

59. **Mr. Zaki** (Egypt) said that it was most regrettable that owing to a number of factors the Committee on Information had been unable to fulfil its mandate; it was to be hoped that that situation would not be repeated in 1998. The Committee on Information played an essential role, and it was unacceptable that it should not be involved in the review of questions relating to information within the United Nations and to the restructuring of the department that provided the services in question. Member States must develop clear decisions and ideas for taking them into account in elaborating and implementing United Nations information policies. It was important that the Committee on Information should endorse proposals and ideas relating to the policies and programmes considered in that connection before they were put into effect.

60. The restructuring of the Department of Public Information must meet the concerns of all Member States, which were the main users of United Nations information services. The reform process must be vigorous, have clear goals – so that it led to effective performance – and be cost-effective. Moreover, mechanisms that had functioned well must be preserved.

61. It should be borne in mind in connection with any proposed change in the structure of the Department of Public Information or in its order of priorities that the General Assembly was responsible for adopting all resolutions relating to the implementation of information programmes on issues that the Organization was considering, such as programmes relating to decolonization, the question of Palestine, peacekeeping operations, development and so on. The goal of reform should not be to reduce or eliminate a specific programme or set of programmes, as that would clearly conflict with the mandate and resolutions of the General Assembly.

62. While his delegation recognized the growing importance of the use of modern technological methods for transmitting and receiving information as a result of the information-processing revolution, it should not be forgotten that whole societies remained totally dependent on traditional means of obtaining information, such as radio. Computers could not replace print media. The reform process should preserve currently available means of transmitting and receiving information.

63. His delegation attached great importance to the use of the Arabic language in all United Nations publications, and urged the managerial staff of the Department of Public Information and those in charge of the reform process to continue to attach importance to the working languages of the United Nations.

64. **Ms. Laose** (Nigeria) noted with satisfaction that publications dealing with economic and social development, such as *Development Update* and *Africa Recovery*, continued to be issued on a regular basis. Her country, which constantly contributed troops to peacekeeping operations in the framework of the United Nations and other international forums, attached great importance to ensuring that such activities received the publicity they deserved, both from the standpoint of the safety of the troops and to gain the support of the international community. Accordingly, her delegation welcomed the efforts aimed at improving the guidelines for the public information components of United Nations peacekeeping and field missions.

65. Since peace, security and development were the focus of the Organization's agenda, every effort should be made to publicize and achieve those objectives. There was a need for more coverage of disarmament, especially in the area of nuclear weapons. People desired to live in a nuclear-free world, and the United Nations should report back to them on the efforts being made in that regard.

66. With regard to the public image of the United Nations, there was a need to highlight the Organization's scope and its impact on the peoples of the world. The Organization's strategy must include the dissemination of relevant information to various parts of the world. Developing countries wished to know what the United Nations was doing and could do to improve their lot, while developed countries might need to know about the actions being taken to make the world safer and free of weapons of mass destruction. Enhanced coverage would enable the peoples of the world to identify more strongly with the Organization; in that context, the United Nations information centres had an important role to play. It was regrettable that the merging of some of those centres with UNDP field offices had sometimes led to a lack of respect for the functional

autonomy and programmes of the Department of Public Information, a situation that must be remedied immediately.

67. The General Assembly adopted a resolution annually on information in the service of humanity that reaffirmed the commitment of Member States to freedom of information, in particular, and expressed concern at the existing disparities between developed and developing countries in that area. At the Fifth Conference of Ministers of Information and Communication of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, held in Abuja in September 1996, the Governments of developing countries had stressed the need to take more dynamic action and invest more resources in information and communication. At the global level, there was a need to revitalize the concept of a new world information and communication order. The developed countries must be committed to sharing information technology with the developing world, and must use their superior technology to deliver information more objectively, so as to elicit support for the development of poorer nations, rather than to vilify them.

68. With regard to the efforts to bridge the information gap, she expressed appreciation to the Department of Public Information for its training programme for journalists and broadcasters from developing countries. Her delegation noted with satisfaction that UNESCO had agreed to help to prepare developing countries to benefit from the "information highway". For their part, the developing countries would endeavour to take full advantage of the offer of assistance, as they were aware of the importance of modern information technologies.

69. **Mr. Ifthekar Ahmed Chowdhury** (Bangladesh) said that his delegation supported the Secretary-General's efforts aimed at restructuring the United Nations system, which also entailed reorganizing the management of its current public information system. An effective public outreach system to keep the international community informed was an imperative that could not be ignored. The image of the United Nations, and more importantly, its survival, depended on the effectiveness of such a system in an increasingly complex, changing and profit-motivated world.

70. While recognizing the priority and urgency of the United Nations reform initiatives in that field, his delegation was uncertain of the extent to which the report of the Task Force would contribute to changes in the current communication system. In considering the recommendations of the task force, the views of Member States should be taken into account, particularly those of developing countries.

71. Another source of concern was the imbalance between developed and developing countries in the area of communication technologies and infrastructure. It was the role of the United Nations and its information system to bridge such gaps; accordingly, his delegation recommended an increase in technical assistance to developing countries and the organization of intensive training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from those countries.

72. The Department of Public Information should disseminate information and carry out its work in a balanced manner so as not to be seen as biased towards any particular value system. Electronic media could reach a much wider audience than print media, to which only educated persons in the developing countries had access. Radio and television could transmit information widely and instantaneously, transcending geographical boundaries.

73. Bangladesh attached special importance to the United Nations information centres, which facilitated the working relationship between the United Nations and local media, while enabling the Organization to cooperate with civil society, non-governmental organizations and other partners. The centres should have modern facilities and sufficient staff. His delegation reaffirmed its disagreement with the decision to merge the information centres with UNDP field offices, since the Organization needed a strong, efficient and cost-effective information network. The United Nations information centre in Dhaka, for instance, had become less efficient since merging with UNDP. His delegation therefore proposed that an in-depth review of the Dhaka centre's role should be carried out in consultation with the host Government, and emphasized that the centre should remain a completely distinct entity, separate from the UNDP resident office and headed by a locally recruited director.

74. **Mr. Al-Zayani** (Bahrain) said that information played a very important role in international relations as a means of contact between various peoples, a tool for exchanges of expertise and an excellent means of strengthening cooperation. The mass media should disseminate reliable information so as to create an effective information order with a view to the consolidation of peace in an era marked by the interdependence of national interests.

75. There had been much debate concerning the elements needed in order to create a new world information and communication order, and ideas relating to that new order had been reflected in General Assembly resolutions based on the Committee's recommendations. Those ideas referred to the elimination of the disparities between advanced and developing countries in the field of international news broadcasting, access by developing countries to the relevant

technologies and the development of those countries' technical and human resources with a view to the improvement of their information and communication systems.

76. With regard to the merging of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices, there was a need to avoid focusing on the negative aspects of such integration so as not to jeopardize the work of the centres. What was involved was an experiment which should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

77. The United Nations information centres were the Organization's tribune and the source of its message; hence, their effectiveness must be enhanced. Their activities should be designed to reach the broadest possible audience through the use of innovative means that could achieve genuine interaction and understanding of the role of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security. The centres also played an important role in disseminating information about the cultural activities and programmes of the United Nations; however, if they were to give greater publicity to the work of the United Nations and its goal of strengthening peace and development, they must have the necessary resources.

78. The Department of Public Information had performed a valuable service in disseminating information on commemorative events. The fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations had provided a clear example of the effectiveness of the Department's work, as had the coverage of the June 1997 special session of the General Assembly, when the Department, through the use of the Internet and with the assistance of the United States media, had conveyed the image and sound of the meetings to all countries of the world.

79. **Mr. Shahril Effendi** (Malaysia) said that his delegation subscribed to the belief that the advancement of information and communication technology should bring with it greater access to knowledge and education for the general public. It was imperative to redress the imbalances in the flow of information between developed and developing countries, which had resulted in the distortion of information and prevented the vast majority of the world's population from becoming well informed. The print and electronic media constituted an all-powerful instrument that was used to influence public and political opinion, and the fact that a small number of States and individuals had virtual control over the flow of information was cause for concern.

80. His delegation concurred with the observation contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/52/455) that one of the most important responsibilities of the Department of Public Information was to disseminate accurate, objective and timely information, and it supported the recommendation of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities that the communications function should be at the heart of the Organization's strategic management.

81. His delegation also supported the recommendation on strengthening the Organization's capacity to communicate at the country level and, in particular, the proposal for an increase in national personnel in order that information on the Organization's work and activities might be addressed in a meaningful local context. It was necessary to finalize the process of integrating the United Nations information centres into a single entity on a case-by-case basis and in consultation with host Governments. That should help to avoid duplication and to increase efficiency and cost-effectiveness. It was important, however, to ensure that such integration did not diminish the capacity of the centres to accomplish their important work, especially in developing countries.

82. As a troop-contributing country, Malaysia hoped that basic information pertaining to the safety, well-being and organizational tasks of United Nations peacekeeping troops would be addressed adequately and conveyed in a timely, balanced and well-coordinated manner. In that connection, his delegation welcomed the progress made in the plans for a public awareness campaign to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping activities in 1998.

83. **Mr. Barg** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the importance of information was well known, and that recent technological advances could have positive effects for the peoples of the world, if information flows and science and technology were used appropriately to contribute to prosperity and development in all spheres. There was, however, a vast disparity between rich and poor countries. The former possessed a wealth of knowledge, while the latter remained in a state of ignorance. The monopoly of knowledge was a very dangerous phenomenon which had generated the main problems of the developing countries in the economic and social spheres.

84. His country had been a victim of a Power which had sought to undermine the position and attitudes of his Government and to impose policies and opinions in conflict with national principles and values. The information media of the United States and its allies had falsified the positions of his country, which had merely resisted domination and interference in its internal affairs, and had ignored Libya's efforts to achieve a peaceful and fair solution to the

Lockerbie crisis. The media had not reported that his Government had accepted the proposals and initiatives of regional and international organizations, such as the Arab League, the Organization of African Unity, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Movement of the Islamic Conference, which represented more than one third of the Members of the United Nations, aimed at bringing the two individuals suspected of sabotage to trial before an impartial court in a third, impartial country. It was clear that the Western media had sought to confuse world public opinion by unjustly accusing Libya of terrorism.

85. The one-sided and false reporting in the flows of information from some big States could have serious political and economic consequences for small States striving to achieve development, and it generated racial and religious conflicts. Accordingly, his delegation supported the proposal for the elaboration of a code of conduct for the media and the establishment of a new international information order characterized by justice and fairness, which respected the decisions of peoples regarding their lives and their economic, political and cultural choices. The responsibility of the United Nations in that sphere was now more important than ever, given the advances in information technology. There was a need to find effective means of strengthening understanding among peoples and achieving international relations based on cooperation, not confrontation.

86. It was a matter of concern that, while 18 years had elapsed since the General Assembly had, in its resolutions 33/115 and 34/182, established the Committee on Information and requested it to promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation of information, the achievement of that goal was still a long way off.

87. Moreover, his delegation stressed the need to ensure that the use of electronic media by the Department of Public Information would not be detrimental to traditional media, which would continue to be essential to conveying the problems of the third world. His delegation also emphasized the importance of the use of the Arabic language, which was an official language of the United Nations, in the Organization's information programmes.

88. **Mr. Wensley** (South Africa) said that the Secretary-General's decision to set up a Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities deserved the support of Member States. In its report, the Task Force addressed a number of critical areas which deserved favourable consideration. In that connection, his delegation, in principle, fully supported the placement of the communications function at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization.

89. In an organization such as the United Nations, the communications and information function was of cardinal importance if the Organization was to remain relevant. The public image function was crucial in convincing those who, based on certain limited perceptions, continued to seek to deprive the United Nations of the necessary means and resources which were vital in order for it to fulfil its mandates as entrusted to it by Member States.

90. His delegation welcomed the improved use being made by the Secretariat of the latest information technologies, including the Internet and electronic publishing technologies. Access to the United Nations Web site not only facilitated delegations' work, but also succeeded in bringing the activities of the Organization into offices, libraries, news services and homes around the world. While welcoming the fact that that technology had cut the Organization's printing costs, his delegation emphasized that, in the interest of delegations from developing countries which did not, as yet, have full access to the latest information technology, the traditional means of document distribution should not be adversely affected.

91. In South Africa, the development of telecommunications had had a distinct colonial character. The lack of an entrenched democratic system and the legacy of apartheid had given rise to an environment where strife and poverty as well as economic and social decline were widespread. His Government was seeking to eliminate past imbalances so as to ensure that future generations would enjoy a knowledge-based society. The new information technologies and telecommunications infrastructure had the potential to become the major contributing factor to overall economic development, not only in South Africa but also throughout Africa.

92. South Africa would be hosting the forum *Africa Telecom '98*, which would be held in Johannesburg in May 1998 with the cooperation of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The forum, whose theme was "African telecommunications: strategies for sustainable development" would focus on the latest telecommunications developments, in particular those which would support developing countries in their efforts to leapfrog infrastructure and information gaps. Moreover, given that telecommunications in Africa suffered an acute shortage of capital, expertise and telecommunications infrastructure, the forum would provide a platform for industry leaders and

regulatory and policy decision-makers to meet with financial institutions and investors in order to discuss strategic partnerships between developed and developing countries. Those vigorous and collective efforts could help Africa to enter the twenty-first century with the hope that all its people would have the right to communications.

93. **Mr. Tašovski** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) recalled that his delegation had traditionally supported the efforts of the Secretary-General to enhance the role of the United Nations in the field of information and it was pleased to see that the Department of Public Information had significantly enhanced its capacity to disseminate information about the achievements of the United Nations through a variety of formats and in different languages. It was his delegation's understanding that the Secretary-General's reform efforts would include reform of the Department, and it supported the proposal that United Nations information centres should be integrated with UNDP field offices, provided that such integration was considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the views of the host countries. The United Nations information centres were very important means for the dissemination of information on the United Nations and the promotion of the Organization's activities in general, and they continued to be important to many Member States, particularly those with economies in transition.

94. His delegation wished to stress the importance of the information component in United Nations peacekeeping missions and it was in favour of the involvement of the Department of Public Information at the earliest planning stage of the missions.

95. The recommendations formulated by the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities in its report entitled "Global vision, local voice: a strategic communications programme for the United Nations" were sound and deserved the international community's support. Many profound changes had taken place in the world in recent years and the United Nations must respond adequately to the new challenges in the field of information in order to strengthen its global role in the twenty-first century.

96. **Mr. Speranskiy** (Russian Federation) said that no one could deny that information played a crucial role in the life of modern society at both the national and international level. In the Russian Federation, where far-reaching transformations were taking place, developments in the field of information and communication were the focus of attention of political circles and general public alike. The Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication at its seventeenth session, held in Paris in March 1997, under the auspices of UNESCO had noted that in societies in transition, the role of journalists would have to change; the latter would have to learn to stop speaking on behalf of the State and start expressing their own thoughts and reflecting current events objectively. The fact that the mass media were growing did not necessarily mean that democracy was growing stronger or improving. Journalists bore a great social responsibility because freedom of the press was not sufficient of itself to protect society's interests.

97. It was natural that the unprecedented changes which had been taking place recently in the field of information and communications should also affect the Organization. His delegation considered well-grounded the opinion of the Secretary-General that change in the orientation of United Nations public information activities was one of the most urgent needs of the reform process. His idea of placing the communications function at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization and consolidating all information activities under the management of a senior official who would report directly to the Secretary-General was sound. His delegation recognized that the General Assembly must play a key role in the strategic guidance of United Nations activities in the field of information and communications.

98. The issue of reforming United Nations information centres should be addressed separately. His delegation supported the Secretary-General's proposals in that regard, particularly his intention to focus on the use of national staff and on the criteria of cost-efficiency and professionalism. It hoped that after a case-by-case analysis, the views of the host countries would be duly taken into account. The United Nations Information Centre in Moscow was playing a growing role in the dissemination of information about the Organization's activities and in mobilizing support for the Organization among various social groups in the Russian Federation and many other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Accordingly, his delegation believed it would be reasonable to preserve the autonomy of that Centre as much as possible and to upgrade the post of its director.

99. Moreover, it was important that the Organization should send clear messages at the country level by disseminating United Nations materials in local languages. The United Nations information centre in Moscow disseminated a large volume of information in Russian about United Nations activities. As the Russian language was spoken by tens of millions of people, not only in the Russian Federation, but also in the countries which had made up the

former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, a wider use of the language in the Organization's information activities would be appropriate.

100. His delegation regretted that at its 1997 session the Committee on Information had failed to address many issues relating to the reform of the Organization in the information field, and it hoped that in the following year the Committee on Information would be able to discuss thoroughly specific issues relating to the reform of United Nations activities in the fields of information and communication.

101. **Mr. Nuñez Mosquera** (Cuba) said that information and communication were two areas in which the challenges of globalization were more clearly reflected, and that it was becoming increasingly urgent to eliminate the huge disparities between countries in the information field. His delegation acknowledged the substantial efforts made by the Department of Public Information, despite its limited resources; its dissemination activities should continue to be strengthened, especially in such areas as economic and social development, nuclear disarmament and the eradication of colonialism. Moreover, the United Nations should reassume its leadership role in providing assistance to developing countries in the information field, particularly in the area of technology transfers, so that those countries could design their own information policies and convey their realities to others.

102. While the United Nations could broadcast televised information via satellite, its audience would be very small, since developing countries did not have the necessary infrastructure. That was a reality which the United Nations could not ignore. Furthermore, if modern media, such as the Internet or the CD-ROM, were to be used, it should be borne in mind that there were still many people who lacked such simple equipment as a radio receiver. The technological revolution had widened disparities, strengthening the power of those with more resources, who used them to impose political, cultural and information models on others. What was involved was a virtual colonization of information which the United Nations should confront with determination. It would be a mistake to regard the demands for a new international information and communication order as a product of the cold war or an attempt to restrict the flow of information. On the contrary, the aim was to promote greater access by the developing countries to state-of-the-art technologies, and a more balanced flow of information. Such a new order would ensure that the press agencies of developing countries found an outlet in the great mass media of the North, now dominated by huge transnational enterprises. Unless such a balance was achieved, the developing countries would remain in the state of information dependency that had been imposed on them.

103. While it was important to be concerned with the public image of the United Nations and with its library, it was much more important for the Organization to contribute effectively to the elimination of the information imbalances between States and to promote technology transfers, so that the developing countries could become more independent in that area. The relevant United Nations bodies could neither escape that reality nor live with the current situation; hence, it was necessary to act with determination. His delegation drew attention to the right of all States to have access to responsible, serious and objective information which fulfilled a social function for the benefit of all. In that context, it was very important that all of the world's people should have the tools with which to gather information and express themselves independently. At the same time, it made no sense to talk about freedom of information while there were millions of illiterate people struggling to survive. At a time when the gap between rich and poor countries was widening, the United Nations could not remain impassive or confine itself to limited actions. That new challenge must be faced, so that the new international information and communication order would cease to be purely hypothetical.

104. His delegation had condemned systematically and would continue to condemn the aggression to which his country was subjected via radio and television broadcasts from the United States, in violation of the principle of sovereignty, international law and the regulations of the International Frequency Registration Board. The anti-Cuban broadcasts manipulated and distorted the real situation in the country and encouraged subversive, illegal and violent actions. His Government categorically denounced and rejected the United States practice of maintaining exclusive broadcasting channels for Cuba and attempting to determine what information Cubans should receive. His Government would continue to take the actions necessary to repel such aggression.

105. Lastly, as the Committee on Information had not been able to conclude its work in 1997, his delegation associated itself with those delegations which proposed that the working methods of the Committee on Information should be revised and that it should be allotted more time and resources in order to strengthen its activities. His delegation was confident that in 1998 the Committee on Information would be able to intensify its far-reaching efforts.

Draft decision contained in document A/52/21, paragraph 63

106. **The Chairman** introduced the draft decision and said that, if he heard no objections, he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt the draft decision without a vote.

107. *The draft decision contained in document A/52/21, paragraph 63, was adopted.*

Draft resolution A (A/52/21, para. 64)

108. **The Chairman** introduced draft resolution A and said that, if he heard no objections, he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt the draft resolution without a vote.

109. *Draft resolution A (A/52/21, para. 64) was adopted.*

Draft resolution B (A/52/21, para. 64)

110. **The Chairman** introduced draft resolution B and said that, if he heard no objections, he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt the draft resolution without a vote.

111. *Draft resolution B (A/52/21, para. 64) was adopted.*

112. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had concluded its general debate on agenda item 89.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.